N° 72. SATURDAY, *June* 17, 1786.

———— *Sors ista Senectæ*
Debitæ. VIRG.

IN every man's lot there are certain incidents, either regarding himſelf or thoſe with whom he is cloſely connected, which, like mile-ſtones on a road, mark the journey of life, and call our attention both to that portion of it which we have already paſſed, and to that which it is probable we have ſtill to go. The death or the marriage of a friend, his departure for a diſtant country, or his return from it, not only attract our notice to ſuch events themſelves, but naturally recal to our memories, and anticipate to our imaginations, a chain of other events connected with, or dependent upon them. Thoſe little prominent parts of life ſtop the even and unheeded courſe of our ordinary thoughts; and, like him who has gained a height in his walk, we not only look on the objects which lie before us, but naturally turn to compare them with thoſe we have left behind.

Though my days, as my readers may have gathered from the accounts I have formerly given,

given, pass with as much uniformity as those of most men; yet there are now and then occurrences in them which give room for this variety of reflection. Some such lately crossed me in the way; and I came home, after a solitary walk, disposed to moralise on the general tenor of life, to look into some of the articles of which it consists, and to sum up their value and their use. When *Peter* let me in, methought he looked older than he used to do. I opened my memorandum-book for 1775.—I can turn over the leaves between that time and this (said I to myself) in a moment—thus!—and, casting my eye on the blank paper that remained, began to meditate on the decline of life, on the enjoyments, the comforts, the cares, and the sorrows of age.

Of domestic comforts, I could not help reflecting how much celibacy deprives us; how many pleasures are derived from a family, when that family is happy in itself, is dutiful, affectionate, good-humoured, virtuous. I cannot easily account for the omission of *Cicero*, who, in his treatise "*de Senectute*," enumerates the various enjoyments of old age, without once mentioning those which arise from the possession of worthy and promising children. Perhaps the Roman manners and customs were not very much calculated to promote this: they

who could adopt the children of others, were not likely to be ſo excluſively attached to their own, or to feel from that attachment a very high degree of pleaſure; or, it may be, the father of *Marcus* felt ſomething on the ſubject of children, of which he was willing to ſpare himſelf the recollection. But though a bachelor myſelf, I look with equal veneration and complacency on the domeſtic bleſſings of a good old man, ſurrounded by a virtuous and flouriſhing race, in whom he lives over the beſt days of his youth, and from whoſe happineſs he draws ſo much matter for his own. 'Tis at that advanced period of life that moſt of the enjoyments of a bachelor begin to leave him, that he feels the ſolitarineſs of his ſituation, linked to no ſurrounding objects, but thoſe from which the debility or the ſeriouſneſs of age muſt neceſſarily divorce him. The club, the coffee-houſe, and the tavern, will make but a few ſhort inquiries after his abſence; and weakneſs or diſeaſe may impriſon him to his home, without their much feeling the want of his company, or any of their members ſoothing his uneaſineſs with theirs. The endearing ſociety, the tender attentions of a man's own children, give to his very wants and weakneſs a ſort of enjoyment, when thoſe wants are ſupplied, and that weakneſs aided, by the hands he loves.

Though

Though the celibacy of the female ſex is ſtill more reproached, and is thought more comfortleſs than that of ours, yet I confeſs it ſeems to me to poſſeſs ſeveral advantages of which the other is deprived. An old maid has been more accuſtomed to home and to ſolitude than an old bachelor, and can employ herſelf in many little female occupations which render her more independent of ſociety for the diſpoſal of her time and the amuſement of her mind. The comparatively unimportant employments of the female world, which require neither much vigour of body nor much exertion of ſoul, occupy her hours and her attention, and prevent that impatience of idleneſs or of inactivity, which ſo often preys on men who have been formerly buſy or active. The negative and gentler virtues which characteriſe female worth, ſuit themſelves more eaſily to the languid and ſuffering ſtate of age or infirmity, than thoſe active and ſpirit-ſtirring qualities which frequently conſtitute the excellence of the male character. There are, no doubt, ſome females to whom this will not apply; to whom age muſt be more terrible than to any other being, becauſe it deprives them of more. She whoſe only endowment was beauty, muſt tremble at the approach of thoſe wrinkles which ſpoil her of her all; ſhe to whom youthful amuſements and gaieties were

the whole of life, muſt dread more than death that period when they can be no longer enjoyed.

It need ſcarce be ſuggeſted, that, to leſſen the evils, and increaſe the comforts of age in either ſex, the ſureſt means are to be found in the cultivation and improvement of the mind in youth: To have ſomething, as it were, in Bank, on which to ſubſiſt the mind when the ſources of external ſupply are cut off; to allow it ſome room for its natural activity when external employments have ceaſed; to preſerve that energy of ſoul without which life is not only uſeleſs but burdenſome. The former exerciſe of the imagination creates numberleſs pleaſures, and its former ſoundneſs prevents numberleſs evils, to an old man. In proportion to the excellence of thoſe objects over which it has formerly ranged, the review of age will be delightful or dreary, will call up elegant or groſs, comfortable or diſtreſſing, elevating or humiliating, remembrances.

When I ſay, that of this better-cultivated old age the remembrances will be more delightful, I do not mean that they will be always more gay. Of melancholy remembrances this ſtate will naturally be more ſuſceptible, than thoſe in which memory has leſs ſtore, and active employment tends more to diſſipate thought. But who would

exchange

exchange melancholy remembrances for the apathy of him who thinks only of the present? Who would exchange, for unfeeling contentment, that creative memory which peoples the present time with past joys, past friendships, past love, though the recollection carries sadness along with it? The most melancholy of all reflections which an old man can make, when he looks around him, and misses the companions of his youth, the associates of his active days, and exclaims, in the natural language of *Petrarch*, "Ed Io pur vivo!"—even in this, to one of a good and pious mind, there is a certain elevation above the world, that sheds (so to speak) a beam of heavenly light upon the darkness around him.

A late correspondent, under the signature of *Atticus*, pleases and interests me much, by a natural, though it is not a new description of the various occupations and feelings of his old age. After mentioning the chequered nature of his past life, on the dark side of which he places the loss of an excellent wife, and several promising children, "The memory of those dear objects," says he, "and the soothing hope that "we shall soon meet again, is now the source "of extreme pleasure to me. In my retired "walks in the country, I am never alone; those "dear shades are my constant companions."

 Shenstone,

Shenstone, with a felicity which perhaps our language could not have afforded him, has expressed this feeling in eight or nine words, to the force and tenderness of which I believe no other words could add. 'Tis in the inscription on *Miss Dolman*'s urn, "*Heu quanto minus est cum reliquis versari quam tui meminisse!*"

In recollecting those whom time has swept from our remembrance, there are some characters whom, though we less respected, and, reasonably speaking, must less regret, we yet cannot help remembering with a feeling, if not so tender, perhaps fully as sympathetic, as the loss of much more dignified personages might produce.—" Alas, poor Yoric!"——Even in what I have passed of life, I recall at this moment the jests, the sallies, the thoughtless gaiety of several such characters, with whom one cannot easily connect an idea so serious as that of death, whom I still wonder at not meeting in the accustomed haunts of their amusement, and cannot, without violence to my imagination, think of as gone for ever.

The regrets of the old for such companions may be the easier allowed, from the circumstance of their time of life preventing them from the acquisition of any such again. But though nothing less becomes an old man than the levity of

of youthful ſociety and youthful amuſements, yet to keep up ſuch an intereſt in them as may preſerve to himſelf the complacency of the young, and a certain enjoyment of their happineſs, is one of the great ingredients of a happy old age. I ſmiled one day at ſeeing my friend *Colonel Cauſtic* buſied in fitting up a fiſhing-rod for a ſchool-boy, the ſon of a neighbouring gentleman, who wiſhed to go an angling on the ſtream that runs through the grounds. "You "think me very fooliſhly employed," ſaid the Colonel; "but do not blame me, till your phi-"loſophy can ſhew a happier face of its making "than my friend *Billy*'s there."

Some old men forget that they are old, and ſome that they ever were young; the firſt are ridiculous in the imitation, the latter peeviſh in the reſtraint of youthful gaiety. This is, generally, the effect neither of good-nature in the one, nor of wiſdom in the other; but reſults, in the firſt, from a fooliſh vanity, and from an incapacity of thoſe better employments and pleaſures which ſuit their age; in the latter, from a ſplenetic regret of their incapacity for thoſe employments and pleaſures which ſuit it not.

Very different from this peeviſh intolerance of youth, is that ſort of gentle diſſatisfaction with the preſent time, which ſome of the beſt-tempered old men are inclined to ſhew. As a

young man, I never complained of this partiality which my ſeniors diſcovered for their own times, or the injuſtice they ſometimes did to the preſent. 'Tis on the warmeſt and worthieſt hearts that the impreſſion of the former age remains the deepeſt. The "*priſci conſcius ævi*," is one whom his coevals loved, and whom his juniors, whom he ſometimes under-rates, ſhould regard; as he who is warmeſt in the cauſe of his abſent friend, is the man whoſe friendſhip we ſhould be moſt ſolicitous to gain. Perhaps it may be accounted a ſort of proof of my approaching the period of partiality for the paſt, when I obſerve, that the preſent race of young men ſeem not likely ever to recall their younger days with the enthuſiaſm which ſome of my older acquaintance expreſs for theirs. That indifference which modern faſhion teaches her votaries, will have nothing hereafter to remember with delight, or to record with partiality. "What audience" (ſaid the ſame excellent friend whom I above quoted) "What audience will "they find in the nineteenth century, for their "eulogium of the ſize of buckles, the height "of capes, or the faſhion of boots, in the year "1785?"

Of the foibles of age, avarice has long been cited as the moſt unreaſonable and prepoſterous; yet, I think, it is much leſs to be wondered at, though

though not less to be blamed, than the declamation of moralists has generally supposed. When excluded from the pleasures which the use of money might procure, we substitute, if I may be allowed the expression, the archetype of enjoyment for enjoyment itself, and prize wealth as the end, when it has ceased to be the means. Old men are niggard of their money as they are profuse of their talk, because the possession of wealth is one of those pleasures in which they can equal younger men; as daws and starlings can pilfer and hoard, who are destitute of plumage and of song.

But there are uses of wealth which some worthy and wise old men discover, that may supply this want of object for its appropriation. To bestow it in the purposes of beneficence, is one of the ways of spending money for which a man is never too old; or if some are so unhappy as to have outlived the relish of this, it is only where they have been at little pains to keep up in their minds those better feelings, which prompt and reward good deeds. That pleasure which Colonel Caustic mentioned, of making happy faces, is a sort of *fine art*, which some people never attain, and others easily lose.

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